



# *Mental Health*

# Newsletter

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## *Editorially Speaking*

Congratulations this month go to Dr. Vera Behrendt, Superintendent of the Willmar State Hospital, on the achievement of 100% opening of the hospital under her direction. The combination of her being one of the two known women superintendents in the United States, operating one of five known completely open mental hospitals, makes her unique.

What is an "open hospital"? The tangible fact of open doors is an important symbol, the climax of a process in depth which must proceed through all levels of hospital organization. This includes that often-forgotten segment of our membership, the patients whom we serve. Door-opening lends itself nicely to tabulation, but does not tell the whole story.

One useful formulation is to think of the "openness" of a hospital as a projection, a summation, a dynamic composite of the openness of mind and heart of those who work and live there, beginning with the therapist-in-chief. You can feel it.... there is an ease, a camaraderie. Patients come and talk to you and no one plucks them away; staff members likewise. Recently a hospital aide claimed family kinship with me. His freedom from anxiety in doing this - and the underlying unconscious acknowledgement of partnership \* are among the nicest compliments I have had, and a real tribute to the hospital chief.

A more concrete formulation is the thought-control to self-actualization continuum. Every organization, institution or social order can be placed somewhere on this line. At one end: brain-washing, indoctrination, house rules, people de-humanized and reduced to units of production. At the other end the highest ideals of western democracy, the opportunity for personal growth, the chance to become more of a man. Here is a clue, I think: The open hospital provides this just as readily for those who work there as for those who are served there. Where does your place fit?

"One little room, an everywhere". One little hospital, a universe - finite but unbounded. As finite as the bed capacity, the personnel complement, the budget dollars loaned by society. As unbounded as man's courage and his eternal yearning for self-hood.

David J. Vail, M.D.  
Medical Director

The Open Hospital - and what it means to Willmar State Hospital patients and staff.

## **WILLMARITES VIEW THEIR "OPEN HOSPITAL"**

### **The patients say....**

"It's hard to put into words, but it's like letting a bird out of a cage! Before this, it was a locked door every time you turned around." This was the statement of a woman patient hospitalized for over thirty years,

From another veteran patient the comment, "It's nice to not have to bother the nurses all the time. Everything is so much prettier now - the rooms, the grounds." A younger patient enthusiastically added, "and we don't have to go to bed so early now.... and we can watch the late shows on T.V. if we want."

A male patient stated, "It's really great! Fellows who used to sit humped in chairs on the wards and wouldn't talk.... now they're getting out, talking to other people, and there's less and fighting."

The new program is a source of wonder to patients re-entering the hospital for treatment after living in the community for several years. As one returnee expressed it, "It's especially nice when my relatives come to visit me. I no longer feel like I'm in jail - and they can come directly to my ward to see me."

### **A volunteer adds....**

"I've been doing volunteer work at Willmar for three or four years now, and one of the things you can feel is a general "uplift" in the patients. They talk more and show more interest in our activities. Besides," she added, "from a volunteer standpoint, it's wonderful. We used to waste a lot of time going after and returning our patients and just plain waiting for doors to be unlocked."

### **From the staff...**

A charge aide remarked, "I'd rather work on an open ward than a closed one any day. Patients improve on open wards. They feel more wanted and become more independent and cooperative. This particular ward has been open for some time, and we frequently had troublesome patients transferred in from a closed ward. It wouldn't be long before they'd become quieter, less quarrelsome and seem to be much happier. These patients began to feel like people again.\*

From a painter's point of view, "It's wonderful for us.... and for the patients, too. Now when we get a ward freshly cleaned and painted, it stays that way. Patients aren't just sitting around, not caring how things look. Now they're proud of their rooms and careful to keep them clean. They keep themselves cleaner and neater too, and have a lot more pep. They've acquired a lot of personal respect."

"Actually, my job is easier now, and because of the relaxed atmosphere, much more pleasant", the charge nurse on a female geriatric ward stated. "Patients watch out for each other. Out of approximately 68 or 70 patients, only one tends to wander, and all day long patients keep coming to tell me exactly where she is."

### **Problems change....**

"Patients' increased interest and pride in their appearance is fast becoming a budgetary problem to us", says Business Manager Joe Solien. "Not only do they want to be clean and neat, but they request clothing that is becoming and in style."

"We've acquired that lived-in look", states Assistant Superintendent Les Johnson. "And since we no longer have disciplinary measures such as seclusion and restraint, we find ourselves assuming the role of parents. To guide patients' behavior and teach them independence and self-reliance, we all should be amateur psychologists."

According to Gene Nelson, Supervisor of the Rehabilitation Therapies Department, "The open hospital program is a wonderful thing, but it's going to necessitate some changes in our activities program. We no longer have a captive audience and until we can increase our staff, we'll have to come up with more activities that patients can do on their own. With the increased activation of patients, there's more demand by them for things to do."

"This is a program which only begins as the doors are opened," added Mr. Johnson, "Once it starts, it begins to mushroom. Not only are the patients raising their sights, but so is the staff, in terms of additional things they'd like to do."

Dr. George W. T. Watts, former Administrative Director, Letchworth Village, Thiells, New York, joined the Faribault State School and Hospital staff as Psychiatrist II last month. Dr. Watts holds a B.Sc., M.A. and M.D. from the University of Alberta, Canada.

Dr. Granger Westberg, associate professor of religion at the University of Chicago Medical School and Dr. O. Hobart Mowrer, research professor of psychology, University of Illinois, will speak at a meeting of state hospital chaplains and clinical psychologists June 16 at the Rochester State Hospital.

Joining the staff of the Central Minnesota Mental Health Center at St. Cloud June 15 will be Social Worker Glyndon Webb. Mr. Webb received his B.A. and M.S.W. from the University of Minnesota; He is currently assistant professor of social work at the University of Wisconsin.

Assuming the chief ship of the social services department at the Brainerd State School and Hospital effective May 31 is Richard J. Kunz, M.S.W. For the past 7 years, Mr. Kunz has been a member of the Ramsey County Welfare department staff.

Richard E. Stepp, former Patient Activities Leader I at Anoka has been promoted to Director of Recreation at the Fergus Falls State Hospital.

Elected to membership on the council of the Minnesota Psychiatric Society at their annual meeting last month was Dr. David J. Vail, Director of Medical Services.

"Behind the Scenes in Community Mental Health" is the title of the paper to be presented by Dr. Herbert Dorken at the Third World Congress of Psychiatry June 4-10, at Montreal, Canada.

Meeting monthly with 25 young women patients at the Cambridge State School and Hospital are members of the local Future Homemakers of America club. To date, FHA members have planned the programs and furnished the treats. At the next meeting, the Cambridge girls will "turn the tables" and provide a picnic lunch for their guests.

The ideology of the half-way house is utilized in the contribution of Brainerd State School and Hospital volunteer Mrs. W. D. Curtis. During the past year or so, Mrs. Curtis has frequently taken patients into her home for a visit of several days or more. Currently residing in the home of Mrs. Curtis during the week and returning to the institution on weekends is a woman patient who is being readied for community placement.

Volunteers from a local Presbyterian Church are providing daily transportation to Mankato for a St. Peter State Hospital patient who is attending a trade school there. Volunteer transportation is also used to get patients to the Mankato Rehabilitation Center for testing. As the St. Peter State Hospital News points out, "there are as many ways for a volunteer to participate in hospital activities as there are activities".

Shown in the current issue of American Legionnaire is Darrell Stave, Volunteer Services Coordinator at Brainerd State School and Hospital, accepting a check for \$1,000 to be used to start a patient library. The check was presented by the American Legion Auxiliary and included contributions from Auxiliary units throughout the State.

A recently started letter-writing service by volunteers at one of the cottages at Faribault State School and Hospital produced the following dictation by a girl in her letter home: "Dear Mother... it's just paradise to have a private secretary!"

### **WILLMAR NOW 100% OPEN HOSPITAL**

Achievement of the 100% Open Hospital goal was accomplished early this month, according to Willmar Superintendent Vera Behrendt, M.D. The Willmar institution thus earns the distinction of becoming the first completely open mental hospital in Minnesota and one of the five known open hospitals in the country.

Willmar State Hospital serves the mentally ill from 17 rural counties in southwestern Minnesota. In addition, the hospital provides an alcoholic and drug treatment program for all female inebriates and male inebriates from all but the five northeastern counties served by Moose Lake State Hospital.

The average daily population at the Willmar Hospital during the month of April was 857 mentally ill and 205 inebriates.

## **Fergus Falls Psychologist Dr. Maurice Moran Finds New Solution to Age-Old Staff Shortage Problem**

How to develop an extensive and effective program of psychological services with a minimum of trained staff is a familiar problem at most state hospitals everywhere. It was the primary challenge facing Dr. Maurice Moran when he assumed the chief ship of the psychology department at Fergus Falls State Hospital in October.

Recruitment of psychologists with graduate training at the master's level and beyond is, because of short supply, a difficult task; for a hospital in a rural area in the northern part of the state, it is even more of an undertaking.

To ease somewhat the recruitment problem, and to make more effective use of the trained staff he had, Dr. Moran with the assistance of State Psychology Consultant Dr. Howard Davis, devised an experimental plan to use recent college graduates as psychological technicians in the department program. This was launched in February, when mid-year graduates Sharon Lawrenz, of the University of Indiana, and Caroline Sedlacek, of Concordia College, joined the staff.

Although their duties consist primarily of doing the "legwork." for the department (administering and scoring group tests, collecting data for research, etc.) the new technicians are gradually, under close supervision, extending still further their yeoman's service to the psychology department. Lectures on mental hygiene to student nursing classes have already begun; with additional experience and training, Dr. Moran plans to work his new technicians into leading ward discussion groups and participating in psycho drama activities.

In many ways, this is an effective training program for future needs, as well as those of the present, according to Dr. Moran. By recruiting at the B.A. level where the selection is greater, the most promising young people may be secured. After a year or so of work experience they will be eligible for graduate training under the state stipend program and return to give further service after their schooling. In the interim, they are doing an important job of relieving the professional staff members of the more routine tasks and broadening the department's services in the research and group testing areas, Dr. Moran states.

**Division of Medical Services  
Department of Public Welfare  
Centennial Office Building St.  
Paul 1, Minnesota**